

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

BRIEFING PAPER

CURRENT ISSUES IN US-ROK SECURITY RELATIONS

The alliance between the US and Korea has been successful in its central aspect: deterring war for more than thirty years, despite a heavily armed and belligerent North Korea. In view of the profound effects war in Korea would have for the stability of Northeast Asia and our broader interests, the maintenance of peace and security on the Peninsula remains our fundamental policy goal, and is one that requires constant attention. We do not anticipate major problems in this area during the President's visit. The President will, however, need to be prepared to respond to several specific Korean interests and concerns:

Response to Provocations: The Rangoon incident reinforced ROKG convictions that they face a constant danger of military or terrorist action by the North, and gave additional impetus to their argument that ROKG and US forces should be prepared to respond quickly and vigorously to any such provocation. The Koreans had previously suggested that a pre-approved retaliation plan should be devised that would allow timely reaction. We said we could not agree to any such plan. In the immediate aftermath of the Rangoon bombing, we stressed to the Koreans, as we had earlier, the need to avoid precipitate or unilateral military action, and that existing consultative and command arrangements should be fully respected and utilized. We believe the Koreans understand that unilateral military action would severely strain our relationship, and their performance since Rangoon has reflected admirable restraint. We have tried to strengthen the case for restraint by helping the ROKG reap diplomatic gains from the Rangoon tragedy, as well as by occasional admonitions against unilateral actions.

Security Assistance: We provide Foreign Military Sales credits to Korea to assist ROKG efforts to pursue a force improvement plan designed to narrow the North's military lead. The necessity to operate under Continuing Resolutions, combined with Congressional earmarking of funds and competing priorities elsewhere, have resulted in shortfalls for Korea which are of great concern to the ROKG. We have assured the Koreans that we will continue to do what we can to obtain adequate FMS appropriations, but at the same time have tried to avoid raising their expectations. We have also attempted to de-emphasize the political importance of security assistance in Korean eyes, making the point that FMS levels should not be regarded as an indicator of the strength of the US commitment.

Third Country Sales: The ROKG must have our permission to sell US-licensed military equipment to third countries. It believes we are overly strict in giving this permission and that some ailing Korean defense industries would be saved if we would only adopt a more flexible approach. This desire to expand sales has led to some unauthorized sales of US-licensed equipment, in particular to the

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Middle East. We are trying to be forthcoming to Korean requests for mission to expand third country sales, but we cannot do as much the Koreans want. We must factor into Korean sales the impact on the sales of US defense firms, Congressional pressures to keep jobs in the US, and our need to keep a "warm base" for our defense industries. In any event, we will not allow the Koreans to sell US-origin items and technology where we will not sell such items or technology ourselves, and are obliged to take legal action if they do.

Korean Interest in a "Strategic" Relationship: While the US commitment and troop presence is strategically important in the sense that the maintenance of peace on the Peninsula is essential to the security and stability of Northeast Asia, our forces in Korea, and the commitment itself, are directed toward the threat from North Korea, not the broader Soviet military challenge. The Koreans would like to add a more explicit strategic dimension to the relationship, and have indicated they would welcome the deployment of longer-range nuclear forces to Korea (e.g., ground-launched cruise missiles). We have responded to those overtures in a noncommittal way; we do not wish to foreclose the possibility that we might at some point wish to take advantage of such offers, but we would want at that time to weigh carefully the effects upon US-USSR arms reduction talks as well as the potential impact upon our bilateral and regional interests (including the reactions of Japan and the PRC). We believe that an economically strong, politically stable Korea is in itself the best contribution to our East Asian strategic interests.